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Baby, let go

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Baby, let go

by

Danielle Lea Buchanan

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Major: Creative Writing

Program of Study Committee:
Barbara Haas, Major Professor
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The student author, whose presentation of the scholarship herein was approved by the program of study committee, is solely responsible for the content of this thesis. The Graduate College will ensure this thesis is globally accessible and will not permit alterations after a degree is conferred.

Iowa State University
Ames, Iowa
2019

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ABSTRACT

_Baby, let go_ is a hybrid, non-fiction manuscript.
AVOCADO

Avocado: a.k.a alligator pear i.e. Mother’s favorite fruit. Its shape: an inverted uterus that’s 80% water, equivalent to amniotic volume of a womb. Inside the avocado nuzzles the embryo—a mahogany fetus cratered by the stomach’s rind.

I fill pockets with avocados and salt to slice them open in the radiation waiting room. Cut after cut into green custard with a plastic, hospital knife—the berry’s architecture is to be trusted when the human body cannot. There’s an outside, an inside, a middle. Interior indentation marks deterministic presence of a mass to hold.

Once, an avocado was empty. The fruit without a seed is called a cuke. It’s commercially unmarketable and disposed of. State IV follicular lymphoma: Mother’s diagnosis. Prognosis: five years. Lately, my eyes slice into the day. There’s nothing inside it.

Generations (Mother, Grandma Willa, Great Grandma Fern) are nothing but indentations that shape this form around a mahogany memory. Time is coated in a pine-colored custard.
Bananas are on the regular. Their crescent-shaped communication is less capricious, less volatile. Its sugar browns in clusters to a metronomic beat. The avocado, however, stumps time with its innate sensibility to survive. It code switches to assimilate to Mother’s corporeal decay. Her avocados onyx, synchronizing with the bodies decline. Ripening asymmetrically befuddles the entity who desires to guac it. To flummox God, if only.

Independently owned $4.67 Co-op organic avocado with soil phosphate levels that don’t exceed 5.5 pH properly balanced with fulvic acids to ensure an exemplary meat mousse. Bought: One. It sits on a windowsill in tumor’s kitchen—one room away from Mother’s body.

Avocado day one: hard.
Day three: hard.
Day four: black.

Dress the avocado in a hospital gown. Fasten cotton with twill tape. Sear fruit with mustard gas to umber it emerald again with innovative Mayo technology.

Them: “Your Mother is in remission.”
Her: “Well shit, there goes the good drugs.”
The hospital is humanities ripening room. Pipes spritz ethylene gas on patients who are admitted retroactively to die preemptively. God’s name is Gil Henry, a 1980’s farmer. In response to store cameras that displayed shoppers squeezing hard, unripe avocados and putting them back into the bin again—Gil’s chemotherapy for avocados softened quickly their bodies.

Porcelain is a far more reliable support system than me. She’s collapsed, Mother. Cradling her body that’s shaped like a question mark on the floor. As if other foreign bodies that body the body speak in indecipherable tongues to one another. The floor: a mosaic of scatology. Her purple beanie with a red bow, lined with blonde scalp, crusts in a corner. “I’m so sorry,” she says. “I tried to hold on.” Days later: “Baby, let go.” To accept that we’re nothing but rooms walking in and out of one another, she said. No one is here for long, she said.

Day one after bathroom incident: I hang Modigliani on her walls and plant Mother mums. She rips down the art and trips over the flower bed in her walker. Ambulance. Day two: we sing the Fugees together, like always we’d do, “Killing Me Softly.” That harmony, one time, one time, hey yo L, you know you got the lyrics. She doesn’t. She’s got blood, coughs it. I’m alone. Day three: Feeling in legs—lost.
What if to cut a tiny slit in an avocado to feed it OxyContin? To stabilize its dying and opioid pain away. Greening up, browning down. To halt sudden craters, inconspicuous growths, magenta bruises. Mother’s misted every 30 minutes in lettuce lights—lustrously electric water as diagnosis gropes her to prognosis to maturity.

Piggly Wiggly special: .50 per avocado. Bought: 8

Avocado day two: browning
Day three: browning still
Day five: naked avocado pits devoid of flesh

Remission: inside Mother’s body, brown gnaws through burgundy marrow. Her spinal column is ribboned with tumors full of helium that balloon against calcium. Mother’s skin smudges chalk onto a car’s arm seat, console, the walls, dinner table. Alabaster footprints trail where she’s been motionless too long. Her existence dissolves and stamps what’s touched tangibly. Powerful woman makes her mark, my Mother. To rub her blood with lime juice, citrus pulp composting inside her veins, to slick her with acid to halt ripening.
Road-side vegetable and fruit stand. $1 per avocado. Bought: 3

Avocado day one: callous, asteroid hard
Day two: sudden indentation
Day three: softening
Day four: wicker basket of mold fur

In remission, time ticks at only “that time when,” “that day.” The world locomotes around “this,” “that” moments—till “this,” “that” is a time that doesn’t move forward, but traces memory over and over.

It’d be politically callous to say I’d be aborted alive.

I watch avocados in the dark to catch paralleled oscillations between human and fruit in vacillations from malachite to black. If I blink, will the avocado collapse into a riboflavin tumor? Mother cries. I brown inside. What if she altered color instead of expressed pain? She’s not dying, she’s tinting. Brown wades against the skin, soundless. When she dies, I’ll be aborted alive and abandoned.
Guacamole is an anomalous victory. That’s why the guacs gone in a second. Why it’s beaten with a fork. Suffocated in the soap of cilantro. Bonfired with lime. Ingredients synthesize in a stable aspen green, then paperclipped together with salt. Biological gastronomy syncopates when avocado time syncs with human time. A silver bowl heaps in suede green. A perfect moment. An absolute perfect moment. But tomorrow, will prognosis remain the same?

This day: her hands lose control of the motorized cart in Walmart. Toothpaste and deodorant pummel. “I’m so sorry.” Mother says to spectators. “What?” she yells at me. “Everyone is staring.” The strongest woman I know can’t control a finger. Hands beat erratically at her sides. A tuft of loose hair falls out her pink, knit cap with a bow. “The carts brakes don’t work, that’s all” I say, feigning there’s no weakness in my Mother.

That day: Her legs are legs again but burning like bonfires, she says. She says like watermelons split open if she takes another step and each grass blade is an ax. Heavily, Mother leans on me because now her legs aren’t legs. Swift they come, quicker they go. She skootches “motherfucker,” into the passenger “oh God, please,” seat of her white “I can’t anymore” Mitsubishi. Breathless, she bunches the tops of her jeans together and grabs them to lift her legs onto the floorboard. Swiveling, lots. I’ve been put on this earth to swerve around potholes
for my Mother. She cries beside me because I hit one. Duty: swerve, potholes, slow. This duty is enough. Potholes, swerve, slow.

That day: Medicaid has an eight month long waiting list to get her a rocker with wheels because there are no more wheelchairs. I dolly her out to a chair on the porch to watch the thunderstorm. Rain munches our toes. “I wasn’t a good Mother,” she says. I try to remember “this” and “that” but time coagulates like headcheese jelly. You can’t see through the aspic and lard of it. Increasingly, to touch time i.e. to remember only makes it jiggle, furthering it as unviewable.

We vacillate between nihilism and namaste.

Mother’s skin lesions scream open in curded juices. “Baby, let go.” To graft, one section from an avocado tree is glued into the stock of another. I’m wrapped in electrician’s tape, bound to Mother with rubber. Is an umbilical cord the original grafting method? My stem joins her stem, runs from six feet under, climbs up night to wherever death is. We spin into vined clusters around trains, light posts, the moon—graft infinite—till the sun is feathered in waxy leaves. Grafting is better than cremation, better than spilling avocado oil and ashes into the ocean.
Biologists say the avocado was created for ecological relationships with excessively large, extinct animals for the necessity of seed dispersal. The mammoth eats an avocado, expels it through the anus, and the avocado tree sprouts in shitcake. God is on all fours, hair dreadlocked in icicles and mud. He crawls. He defecates.

In a tiny, rural country store you’re only allowed two avocados per purchase. Fifty cents each. $1.00. Mother returns every day.

In her dark kitchen, looking out the window, she cuts an avocado in half, knives out the pit, sprinkles meat with salt and spoons it. Mother shakes at the sink in her untied hospital gown. Tumors, like white avocado footprints, tread up her spine. Their tracks seep mud through her skin as they grow, aimless and indecisive with no destination. Some day: I let go. Mother’s in a paper bag, set on a sill, awaits the morning.
KNOWN ABOUT

Known about father: he hung a live lamb by hooves with orange electrical cable upside down to Mother’s showerhead and split its throat with scissors. It was their first date. His name: Siade Daghestani.

As a little girl, I asked Mother about him. Her reply: “he was a good, good man. A good man.” Time passed. Good was not good enough. When older: “Where is he?” I’d ask. “Far, far away,” she’d say. Older still: “Why did he leave?” Older still: “Did you love him?” Still: “Was he a good lover?” Still: How do I find him?” Unanswered, these went. Recently, she said “You have his eyes. He was a short man.”

With each asking, Mother grabbed quick a mop head, Swiffer jet, squeegee. Rather than answer, there’d be a tub to scrub, dishes to do, trash to take. Diversion: she told stories about him over a garbage disposal’s yodel, suds and a water’s roar, a vacuum’s penny suck. Memories came in Clorox wafts, ammonium, any chemical that gristled nostril tendons and blew open windows.
What I held: one small polaroid of Father with jagged edges that I pocketed in Osh Kosh overalls and pulled out at any friend’s house who friended me or had a dinner table with food and family with a Father because I am hungry.

Once, it was bratwurst Dutch-ovened for five hours in brown sugar, Guinness, and caramelized sauerkraut with Marceline Hickenbottom. Marceline sat in the middle of two: a Mother, a Father. They grew symmetrically out her scalp: two high-raised, blonde ponytails postured perfectly to the left and right of her head. Spoons scraped against porcelain. I dropped the copper culinary utensils, dabbed my lips with the the cotton napkin and dug into my pocket’s back. Should I strike twice upon the cobalt chalice?

“Pardon?” I ask? sliding from the tiger claw bar stool to the floor. Lusciously ripe, burgundy carpet flooded cherry up my toes.“This is my Father, Siade Daghestani.” I carouselled around the Hickenbottoms, spin him in my fingers, flashed Father in their faces. Silence. Spoons and porcelain.

Earlier that day, Marceline, her Mother and Father wrestled in the living room. Horseplay, chasing, laughter. Witnessing domestics like this, I suddenly hated my own home and the Nickelodeon of them rollicking across the room.
“This is my father, Siade Daghestani.” Silence. I put my Father’s eyes eye level with Marceline’s Father’s eyes. “He was short,” I said. “A good, good man,”

“He has one eye,” Marceline said, “and a silly hat.” Marceline’s parents shushed her by rubbing her back tenderly in concentrics.

“Where is he?” her Father asked. He thrust his chin toward me, a bulbous bone dangerously angular as butt end of a hammer.

“Close, almost here, near, coming for me,” was something or other I said.

“Where is he?” I always asked Mother.

“Baby, let go.”

“Liar!” shouted Marceline, flicking her spoon. Sauerkraut flung. “You don’t have one.”

“Marceline? her Mother asked, rising out the stool. Yes, I thought. Ground Marceline. Time out. Instead, Marcline’s Mother excused her own self to the bedroom.

Marceline’s Father pat my head and I pat his hand patting me to madden Marceline.

“He has two eyes, Marceline. You don’t see.”

Father was in reach. All I had to do was check my right pocket compulsively. Girdled with guilt, sometimes, against my will, in tears, kicking Mother, hot spit, spittling down, overalls had to be unhooked.
Worn so often, they wrapped me pith tight as scar tissue to a clementine. Mother peeled Father from me and I’d forget him in the uproar. Laundry existed.

Finally, I failed my Father in tumble dry, super plus, high heat, heavy duty, air fluff. Eventually, his eyes: potholes. Mouth: an incision that forgot language. Burned the second degree inside a Maytag machine, to open the dryer door was to enter a crematory of swirling ash and Betty Boop socks.

He wasn’t a sand nigg** wearing a porkpie hat like Marceline Hickenbottom said. He didn’t frail out nor roll into an eternal lint silence that I held in front of faces to show the birthplace of my face. My face: unoccupied residency for a paternally defunct squatter. “This is my father, Siade Daghestani.”

Once, holding him up to the sky, peach light trespassing through, I saw him take his last ripple. All became transparent. What I should have asked, since I was a little girl is: Mother, tell me about you by telling who you’ve loved.
Facebook message from Mother: sry took so long to get back about your father. why now you’ve never asked. I met him through your aunt. he was a airplane mechanic. really green, didn’t know much englsh. favorite word was CHEERS!!!!!!! 5’8 all muscle in a safari suit. always dressed like king or in white linen. gentle, soft spoken, talked to anyone even mafia. boy he danced, he loved to dance dance dance and you know i do too and you. he’s how i told you never marry anyone who dont dance. he got a lamb from some farm and walkd it on the electrical cable like a leash through my apartment. There wasnt nff meat on it to feed a maggot i remember its knees wombling probably because he tied it atop the Mazda and he said many times it fell and he had to stop the car and pick it up again and again. i remember it was out first date and he wanted to surprise me but i was pissed b/c my shower curtain stained with blood everywhere but he the meat was tendr. everything was bible bread and chickpeas. adored him. us wallace girls was datin all Saudi men and their wives
threaten to beat our shits is how they said it. your father was always jumpin on a little rug to pray. all times jumpin that rug. after sex on that little rug to pray. after drink on that little rug to pray. once i played a trick on Arabs and fed them pork rinds.......then told them pork rinds was pork. Never seen so many upset men jumping little rugs to pray. gave you the only picture of him. u walk like him like you’re leading an army. his best friend was a man from iran who ate cat food bc he mistook for tuna. Siade tried to take you to Medina but family wouldn’t let him. court fiasco. we knew goats get front seats before a woman

:: he wanted me?
I ACCOMPANIED

I accompanied Mother daily to the Garden Valley Alzheimer and Dementia clinic. Before cancer, she was a nurse.

To enter Garden Valley, a code pushed a steel gate. Metal welcomed us in its slow-armed open swing as if there’s time always for one’s time to stop, infinite time for neurological miscarriage. This was mother’s place of double-graveyard, double-function as nurse practitioner and system’s coordinator place-of-employment.

To get to Garden Valley, there was a bucolic stretch that unwound into woods. English ivy wrapped its dewy tentacles around the Volvo’s antennae. Ducks floated on pine-needled water. Nature curtsied onto the windshield: blooms, pollen, feathers, bug splat, acorns. Silk worms comma’d limbs. Mother roll always rolled down windows and released the pedal. There wasn’t rush toward delirium cul-de-sacing room to room.
Within minutes after Mother and I entered the clinic, stampedes of IV poles, ventilators, respirators, feeding tubes and catheters dragged bodies behind them. Machines entered before the physiology they beeped life into. What came next is whatever still grew: silver hisses of hair, skin tags, epidermal protrusions. Patients gathered under a chandelier that gleamed onto a white baby Grand in the dining room. On a stool next to the piano was a bronze gramophone that Edith Piaf’s vocal chords spun around at 8 a.m., 10 a.m., 12 p.m., 2 p.m., 4 p.m., 6 p.m., 8 p.m. It was madness with a pre-Raphaelite flair. Oil paintings of Ophelia and sea nymphs hovered in white, cast iron frames.

At one’s decline, death grammars the body. One becomes punctuated in a wheelchair: a curled question mark stooped in periwinkle house slippers, stiff exclamation point back braced in silver that snapped at the neck, hunchbacked apostrophes or explosive semi-colons in Pampers.

“Please tell me about Mother,” I’d ask patient Mae Ann.

“This is my Father, Siade Daghaestani.”

Ms. Mae Ann: with mauve lipstick on her cheeks and duct-taped sequin heels who was transfixed by plastic sporks.

Ms. Mae Ann, I’d whisper, “does my Mother ask you about me?”
In cognizant moments, she’d reply the same “Your Mother can’t believe something like you was pulled out of her widgie.”

Sometimes, someone ate in the dining room. Mr. Scroggins couldn’t remember his wife but flittered his hands in front of him, knocking dishes from the dining table, spilt milk, as if sculpting oxygen into her recognizable face again. He’d slap intervening nurse aids who came with terrycloth and orange oil until he had to be detained. “Mr. Scroggins, what’s my Mother like?” I’d ask him. He wheeled face first in a dim corner.

She let me put on recitals. I’d plea she watch me, please, but someone was flatlining. I played Chopsticks like my fingers were infested with the unsyncopated passion of jack rabbits fucking atop ivory keys. Most times, I played one note, pianissimo, over and over. Maybe a single perfectly tuned pitch would stop droll from bayou’ing into laps. No one would rip out their pubic hair or repeat do-re-mi-fa-so-la-ti-do for hours. A son would visit. Single memory dilate. Television wouldn’t be a feeding trough. A bouquet of peonies would arrive. Perhaps “I miss you” would slink through a curled telephone cord.
Mother massaged peppermint oil onto toes curled as fiddleheads she slipped wool socks onto. In the courtyard, she planted root vegetables and attempted marijuana. She slipped patients cigarettes. An orchid in every window, it was my duty to place two ice cubes into every pot. Philodendrons stretched lengths of the ward hallways that Mr. Scroggins shit into. Mother would thrift shop for lingerie and bring bags of it into the clinic for the blushes and chokes. She glued red eyelashes on Mr. Robbins, an 80-year-old ex-drag queen stabbed in the abdomen. Mashed plum pumped through a feeding tube that disappeared into a throat hole. Mother tickled his incisions with a guinea feather because he liked the sensation but then began ejaculating so she stopped. She was a favorite. Plus, she IV’d extra morphine.

On her days off, opioids were popped. If I was an oval-shaped narcotic with no appendages, weighed 300 mg and stamped OC, I’d cuddle with Mother. Care I gave was seltzer water to ease the swallow. Immobile due to physical exhaustion, her legs propped for days. I lanced blood blisters that chained her toes, her ankles swollen portabellas that flapped over socks.

Older still: who nurses nurses?

Older yet: Caretakers give affliction a public body. Where does it hurt?
a scale of 1 to 10, what is your pain? To halt, prod, measure and tame the elusive quivering—just as language sedates the quivering it calls.
STAGES OF DETRIORATION

1. Heart stops
2. Skin tightens
3. Muscles relax
4. Bowels empty
5. Temperature drops
6. Blood pools
7. Fluids leak
8. Hair loosens
9. Body bursts
IPOD VOICE

IPOD Voice Note Left by First Love, Two Years Before Mother’s Cancer: “Your writing, Danielle, reminds me of birds that fly home every year. Often times, they have these explosive insights. Then at the moment that they are reaching home because of the cold climate they fall out of the sky and die. Your writing is very tragic, I think, the structure. It is how you write. It is your style. It is a part of your voice. But the birds that must migrate, when they do, they do not fly slowly. They go at a very very fast pace. As if they had a navigational system in their stomach or inside their wings or inside the throat haunting them home. It’s a writing style I think that mirrors your thought processes.. Your writing is a particular kind of bird that’s rare and cannot be found or bred for human satisfaction. It breathes a life of its own. But very quick to die. It’s very quick to die.
THE WIND

The wind yearns and I understand. The whole world can be haved, so
desires larger and in the widest of wanting is less got: a page ripped from a
book, the hem of a dress, but you can’t. The feather of a bird because
that’s all the bird cares to spare. You run hands through hair but yours it is
not. Leaves want you to want them so they change for you and in the
changing they are dyingly weak. You kicked their rotted bodies back and
forth sometimes when bored. Yearning is a current all its own. You harass
the weathervane. You will take a whole god damn roof. You rip it off
clean like scalp from a skull. You take it, it’s yours. Breaking shingles like
bones, you slam fists through windows screaming down telephone poles in
yearn. What you want you cant have so blow a cow in the sky, divorce a
tree from its neighbors, kidnap water from its bed, and rape the roots of
what they cling to longest. Rob people of their homes, wires of its
electricity, and push woman after woman after woman after child from a
building. When will you learn yearn is a clutching for everything which is
nothing at all? There is a girl and you’re outside wanting in forgetting
completely how to whisper gentle. Wait, please. Be still.
VISIT ONE

Visit One: Sun gallops in a wildflower field. A cement cell wrapped in barb wire sits under a lemon tree, drowns in canary, fields of poppy. The windowless room has one rectangular slit for whatever looking within and out there may be. Confined: childhood, trapped in solitary confinement for rehabilitation. Sunday = visit day. Raspberry lollipops, helium balloon, Canterbury Tales is what I bring.


Guiltily I say, “I’m me.” Hands rise above my head in e repeated acts of attempted self-reclamation.

“Procedure…,” “protocol…,” “regulation…,” he says, climbing down the tower. I look around but it’s us and me. Everything, it’s here, open and trickles: Sugar Creek, a Meyer orchard, black walnut tree, and miniature donkeys. Blossoms pump pastel kilowatts into stems. Wattage of this bees buzz slow with,
floating lazily in and out my childhood’s cell. The guard echoes into blue
shimmers of pollen dust that form a wavering other body behind his body. The
second body zests atop flowers, fall atop the thorax of insects.

“I’m here to ask me something,” I say aloud accidentally, forgetting to
colander mind from the mouth. “I’m the only one here with us.”

“Drop the helium balloon,” he demands. “Let go.” It crinkles in air,
guillotined by light. A hummingbird flies into my childhood’s cell.

“This is a misunderstanding,” I say, hands still above my head. “I didn’t
request security.” Flashes of hazel eyes flit between iron bars. Childhood watches.

“You’re pushing something through the slit for you,” he says.

Turning, I strain to see. A note falls into dandelions. Slugs trail cubic
zirconium, incandescent slime, up into my childhood’s cell.

“Time,” he says. “It’s over.”

Drug through clover, I stare over my shoulder for me.

Visit Two: Childhood’s nails, painted red with white ladybug dots, dangle
out the bars. The guard stand is empty but I’m empty handed. Light ignites
wildflowers into aromas of wishes—floral birthday candles blown into
possibilities of becoming. Past is before me. Nothing obstructs it. I distrust this. I
leave and do not come toward me.
Visit Three: A pink phone line dangles out bars of my childhood’s cell. Whistling some 12-bar variation of blues, the guard climbs down the tower.

“Childhood said no visits today.” Mounds of blue pollen hill atop his shoulders. Color spawns. He points toward the telephone line.

“I have something,” I say.

He unhooks a small, silver tray from the back of his holster belt. A bottle of sparkling mineral water, Flintstones Push Pop, and photograph of Mother, Grandma Willa, Great Grandma Fern triply exposed atop one another in ocean water. “Who are they?” I scribbled on back. tray. As the guard walks toward the cell to deliver the items, I scramble to palm the pink cord to wherever it ends.

It stretches down the hill past citrus into cattail through woods into the creek. Water ripples the line into a combustion of ocular illusions. Ankle deep in this, I untangle the cord from around vats of motor oil and bean cans of lug-nuts, crawl under Fern’s John Deere into milk thistle, past the gar pond into the clearing that was best for masoning baby rattlers, under barb, through the catch, in the cut, eyes open. The line waves into red clay of Grandma Willa’s backyard, into a damp earth I odyssey into. My nails loosen from their sockets. Muffled ringing comes from deep. Deeper than root into quartz until wet dusts. Soil vibrates as the telephone is uprooted. Worms and fur sprout out the spore holes.
“Hello?” Mother sings Que Sera, Sera and my laughter thuds like a running, leaves rustling. Great Grandma Fern tells me to sift flour and Willa tells me “baby, don’t cry.” There are sounds of water, an eggshell’s tink against steel, hospital machines beeping, death’s rattle in a throat and a Queen of Aces clapping bicycle spokes. Ditch fires roar, a hoot owl is muted by coyotes. I hear me say “I don’t want to be free, I want to be with you.”

“Hello? Are you here with me?” I ask into the receiver. The sky snaps off. On the line’s other end, I hear “Time.” A click and silence. How to let go? Is liberation increasingly higher forms of sensory deprivation?

Visit Four: I can’t see my face, just small hands and what they won’t do, heavy feet and where they won’t move. Handcuffed behind the back, a tweed sack covers my childhood’s head. I’m naked, shackled by ankles to a porcelain latrine in the cell’s dimmest corner. Solitary drips of water fall from the ceiling onto her head, spiralize slowly down my back into a drain hole. This is all there is: concrete bed, fairytales, slop bucket and an indistinguishable form of slight sustenance. “Who are you?” she asks.
ONCE, THERE

Once, there was a Mother. No, that’s not true. Once there was a sometimes Mother? Never sometimes, there was a Mother once? Always never there was a Mother sometimes? If there can’t be any sometimes truth here where do you always find it?

Once, there was a girl in a room. With windows square and white was the room. Sometimes the sun shone and other times it didn’t. Sometimes floated in a ladybug and sometimes it didn’t. There was always nothing in the room sometimes except the girl filling it.

The sometimes once Mother was in the room always because the girl searched for her only there. The girl stayed in the room because search is the true thing. Isn’t it the only truth if it happened always there? No matter where the girl crawled, the world would be that room. Everything there was ever to find was in it because is anyone ever for once or always?

The sometimes once mother was in the room because the sometimes sisters searched for her always there. Once, sometimes opened the door and
dropped the sisters a potato. The sometimes sisters stayed in the room because it was the only true thing. Isn’t it the true thing if the search was only always there?

The mother was many things except there so was anything everywhere all the time. Sometimes the girl crawled to the crack of the door and waited. Sometimes she cried till her hair and legs grew so she didn’t crawl anymore but walked on them. The room was still there only smaller and fuller of her and the crying still there only louder and further apart.

The space between the Mother and the girl or sometimes and always grew. With the growing of the sometimes came the girl’s arms always for the grabbing and the louder the voice for screaming Mother. The biggest sometimes was now too big for the room and created extra rooms between them.

Once, the girl left the room only to find everything outside the room was the same exact room except of different shapes and colors. The anywhere and everywhere of the world is this room. It’s here, this room, and there’s nothing else to always do about it. The room was too big to feel anything ever outside of it.

Nothing happens in a room but the past catching present. Waiting has doors and rooms of its own to leave again always and maybe return sometimes
just once. And maybe once sometimes never always fills the room with sometimes a daughter, always a Mother.
I BURY

I bury Mother in the backyard with the asparagus. That’s where the Schnauzer digs so I research how to let go, how to stop a dog from its digging.

I wake. “Shotzie!” A dog on a leash pulls me. I pour Darjeeling tea. I lick a stamp, crack a shell, seal an envelope, sprinkle pepper, flip on sound, flip it off, pull back hair. I look in a mirror. I go 50 miles per hour in a car to work. I fax, click, file, print, drag, sign. I go 80 miles per hour in a car back. “Shotzie!” A leash pulls. I unlace, unscrew. I pour, lick, crack, seal, sprinkle, flip, pull.

To the garden I go. When I place the metal spikes of the bulb lifter around the stalk and yank, Mother’s face rips up like a turnip. Her face I hold by hair softly. A worm teethes up her neck. Her face spins around. I steady her to me. Under her, roots dangle. Mother’s eyes drip wet. A clump of soil rolls down her cheek. I stuff her chin back in the earth and push. The nose blows out dirt. She shakes her head no, but I dig a head hole and push her down. Mother crumbles. I bang her scalp with a shovel.
I wake. “Shotzie!” A leash, lick a stamp, sprinkle pepper, I go 50, I return 80, I unscrew.

Only in moonlight Mother’s hair grows. I sit in a chair in the garden. Blonde hair blooms through soil. I clamp the metal teeth of the bulb lifter around Mother’s hair. I pull. Mother’s hair grows long. I back up more. And longer. The scalp rips. Sometimes, I’m not too tender. I try to be tender; I do. Nights, I sit in the garden, braiding Mother’s hair. Sometimes I bring a comb, sometimes a ribbon. Sometimes a horsehair brush to even out Mother’s blonde oil. Sometimes, when she’s not there, I gently brush dirt into parallel rows over with horsehair.

“Shotzie!” I wake. Fax, click, flip.

Troubles: sleeping. I stab the shovel’s metal tip around my Mother’s hair. I dig. Sometimes I shake, other times sweat. My skin is cold as the moon. I dig to the crow of a bird. I dig to the sun, its rise. Dropping the shovel, I twine her hair around my fist and pull. I pull her through the asparagus. I pull her hair through the garden, up the steps, through the door. I close the door on her face. I open the door. I unpeel her forehead from the hinge.

I dig seven, small holes around my Mother. I sit down next to her and blow. In the holes are yellow balloons. Balloons are covered with soil to stop a dog from digging.
FACEBOOK MESSAGE

:: LOVE!
:: made buttermilk soda
:: biscuit
:: HELLO
:: rose water sent. says bulgaria. pls please get taser HONEY
:: snow misses you
:: HELLO
:: rember when you were little?
:: ???
:: well !!!
:: all you wore was brass knuckles to bed. get mannequin for window. people think you home. SAFETY
:: hello?
:: got mannequin. full body grey. address pls
:: HELLO
:: got voicemails. phone shut. U feral happy and a slow sad. sorry middles aren’t us. fern’s fault, our jeans
:: maybe TRAZADONE try it
:: TRAZADONE
:: remember peanuts
:: cayenne keeps squirrels out
:: LOVE LOVE
HERE IS

Here is the house mother bought to fix up, to flip. This was the plan. Here is cancer. Here are the tulips I’ve put. I want you happy here. Won’t they make you? Mother says no, not there at the step’s bottom, it’s too dangerous. She’ll bust her head open on a flower.

Why plant flowers at the bottom of a step? I say but just look at them. We do. They really are something she says. She’s in a cotton Onesie sat crooked in a wheelchair. Disease feeds closer to her than my birth. Tumors are most intimate, know her better. They’ve sipped her spinal fluid softly for years.

Mother’s right hand won’t stop shaking and no one knows why. She sits on it. There. Fixed. We’re staring still at the flowers. This is where I cry. Two days later, this is where she falls, tripping over a mum. Ambulance tracks staple the earth.

Here is a hole in the house that starlings fly through. This is the wall where babies are born into yellow insulation, stuck in plaster, are dropped sometimes a raspberry. Soon, chirps mute and feathers spray inside the walls like wild electricity. Here, there are holes everywhere. Mother saw an armadillo eating canned tuna in the bathroom. Did you open a can of tuna and leave it on the floor for an armadillo she asks? There’s no logic to what invades the body, the
paragraph. We nickname home Nat Geo, short for National Geographic. A family of skunks synchronize spray under deck floorboards. Here is where she reads about how to kill skunks. You fill a giant trash can with water, pour in each skunk from its cage, and slam the lid shut with a heavy limestone on top.

Here is the patio church people put squash and zucchini without knocking anymore. “You mean I’m dying and I get is gourds?”

Here is the wall I hang a Modigliani. Here is the place Mother takes it down. Here is the new place I put a family photo. Here is mother taking it down. Here is me hanging it back up. Here is finding a new place. Here is Mother taking down, here is me putting, here is cancer taking, here is me nailing higher.

GRANDMA WILLA

Grandma Willa planted English Lavender around bedroom windows. We can’t open them. Come night neighbor Jeremiah cooks meth. We use binoculars and part lace curtains. He lives in the red carriage house at the hill’s end of Grandma’s. He’s outside and the blowtorch torches. Jeremiah wears a gasmask and an iridescent blue line runs down the suit. Grandma Willa grabs her purse, pulls the mini flashlight out that’s chained to a vial of nitroglycerin. Her heart retaliates. When pen she writes “Thursday, 2 a.m. Red car: 1. Motorcycles: 2.”

Popo told us to keep records of when meth cooked. We’d sit on her bed in a darkness that spiraled around us as fans blew it. Watching out the window till we got headaches and chests tightened, it was usually Grandma’d say she’s dizzy. We’d go to the furthest part of the house with patchwork quilts that Great Grandma Fern signed in corners. We’d lay down where five Heliomadic air purifiers whir. We slipped surgeon marks over us to sleep.

It sat on five acres and was owned by Grandma, sharing her lot. I wanted that little red carriage house since I was 10. Arched bay windows peek up at Grandma Willa’s mimosas and willows. I imagined grapes and Pygmy goats. Wildflowers and an antique wine press. Of carrying warm quiche Lorraine up the
hill before she woke. Which would have to be at 3 a.m. because by 4 a.m., she was outside in a satin robe rocking with her coffee—taking in darkness, peace, the does. Then Jeremiah moved in. He gutted the place. “For a swimming pool.” Boarded up windows. “For a swimming pool.” Ripped out walls. “For a swimming pool.” Security cameras. “For a swimming pool.” Bear traps around elderberry bushes. “For the swimming pool.” M80’s in the gooseberries. “For the swimming pool.” Streamed the place with barbwire. “For a swimming pool.”

Grandma Willa got a double barrel. It laid across both our laps as we sat in the dark room. Through curtains so lacy and latticed they looked moth-eaten, we watched-wheelers pull in and out her driveway all night. We passed binoculars, salami, Camembert, a bottle of Chablis. Jeremiah’s iridescent blue line walked back and forth in the night. Fuzzy with grapes she writes “3 a.m. Flames higher, smell stronger, one white car, 15 minutes.”

She said, “Fern would put possum shit in his mailbox, then shot around him with her sawed off.”

“I wanted that little red carriage house since 10,” I said. “To be next to you, Grandma.”

“Baby,” she said. “It don’t matter none. No one’s here long. Open that window.”

I did. In came leaking moon, warmed wind. English Lavender beat against mesh screen. We smelled their battery acid. “I love you,” I said.
Text from Grandma Willa: Crab legs are cancelled. Untell later date. Sorry I need to get an eye fixed love you always. Unseeing rapidly. Each visit home, the less Willa can see.

I’m little with a tweed suitcase in the leather backseat of Grandma Willa’s lilac, Lincoln Continental. “Peanuts” she called me which I liked because I couldn’t pronounce “Buchanan” or spell “Buchanan” and never met a “Buchanan.” Grandma Willa’s eyes were hazel straws that slurped me from Mary Janes. I was seen. More than seen: optically ingested.

Text from Grandma Willa: Hey baby quests guess what I found a new drink I dreamed Up. One coconut ice cream Bar, rum and ice to fill one of those lge wine glasses. It is delicious. LOVE. God go with you. Keep going. God do you know how much mint I have. We could forget this damn world exists?

GODS WITH YOUR MOMMA

She’s just tipsy. Relieved, I breathe. In photos, as a girl, Grandma Willa wore red Mary Janes that lace socks bloomed out of. Ankles and wrists thistle
thin, pigtails, mauve lipstick, chiffon sundress and a hand that leashed her pet baby Doe. Picture after picture, I notice what’s around her more than her. Nature kudzus. It’s increasingly invasive, sprouts from Polaroid borders to digest her frame. Roses, woods, grapevines, lemon trees, ivy, thicket, willows, a stream, and a garden accrete with each album page flip until Grandma Willa ceases to be. The rose bush uproot itself, intentionally the stream re-routes, willows straighten posture, the root re-snakes, waters current, and stems elastic just to be near her.

Little and with a ravenous nose, I smelled lots. “Different duck,” Grandma Willa said as I breathed deep any rubber, metal poles, batteries, one pane glass, two pane glass, everything other than raspberry coconut maroons or Easter lilies. The top of a river rock smells different than the bottom. Grandma Willa was born without the ability to smell. I could cure her.

Things put under Willa’s nose: Monkey glue
Elizabeth Arden’s Red Door
A brick from the front yard
Bluejay’s nest
Electrical cables
A sun-bleached brick
Italian parsley
Red pepper
White pepper
Black pepper
Pink pepper
Crush of a walnut
Donkey shit
Muddled gooseberries
A cut hair strand of my own, burned

Waiting for her to smell had a smell. Smell the baby inside?” I ask.
Slippery warmth of a hen’s egg salute feathers into her nose. “No, Peanuts, baby, let go.”

One 4 a.m., she in her satin robe and white fur slippers, rocking on the front porch invaded by soft pines, we confused dew for does, mist for coyotes, and moonlight for bunnies. Mornings, we’d watch nature stretch into erection. “Can you see okay?” I’d ask, then run to the garage and pour a plastic jug of gasoline into a Tiffany glass teacup for her to whiff. Time is everything she had for me.
One morning, neighbors called in a domestic disturbance saying somewhere something terrible happened to some woman. That woman was Eden, Grandma Willa’s pet peacock, who snapped feathers quick as a Japanese hand fan at the Popo when they flashed their lights. Due to noise violations, we got rid of Eden and replaced with her two miniature donkeys named Magdalena and Rocinante. One morning, they left nothing but alfalfa trails and leather harnesses in their wake. Grandma Willa and I spent days in woods looking for them. Then, we got guineas. Those babies were swept by crows. Then, we got a lamb. It had a name, but I stopped knowing them. The lamb ate the daffodils, so we streamed electric fence round the flowers. Milk thistle killed the lingonberries, so we barb wired the fruit. A coyote ate the lamb. We drove to Arkansas for a bantam rooster. It was the meanest son of a bitch. An uncle beat it with a 9 iron so deep in dirt all that stuck out the dust was a red wattle. Each replacement was a terrified neurosis to mask our own impermanence.

A writing professor told me tell a dream, lose a reader. A nightmare: I shoot myself in the face 57 times. It’s always 57 and I never reload the barrel. I’m brailled. My face stays on my face. Grandma Willa rubs her hands over the smoking holes and sticks each finger inside magenta bone froth. Blind, she reads me.
I am a little girl. Grandma Willa is on her knees. Her eyes are potato
peelers, skinning me alive. Her eyes two can openers, I the tin lid. I tell Grandma
Willa, no, I love it. I love old people. I’m not bored. Oatmeal cookies with
molasses is good. No, please, I like the Jehovah Witness stories and I’m praying
right, right? Listen. Armageddon doesn’t scare me, no. “Why cry every night?”
she asks. I tell her because she planted English Lavender outside the bedroom
windows, the windows are open, wind blows through them and she can’t smell
what beats against mesh screen. No, I tell her I want to be next to her eating lima
beans and pig feet from a cast iron pot on a TV tray and watching Dolly Parton
with diamond boots ride a Shetland pony while yodeling. She says something
about outside, others, my age, play, kids. There is a whole world and other people,
she says. I’m sad about this. “Let go."

Nightmare: Grandma Willa asks what a flower looks, smells like. I can’t
find language. Text from Grandma Willa:

Have some kind of eye problem the doctor cannot
figure out. I have to doctor my eyes five times a day.
If the swell does Not go down, I will have to go to
surgery. I think it best I stay home where I can take
care of them. If all goes well, maybe over the holidays we can see your home. Sorry to miss tulips and wildflowers peanuts.
MOTHER, GRANDMA

Mother, Grandma Willa and I were Great Grandma Fern’s caretakers before she passed. “Don’t cry. Don’t look.”

Of little language Fern was the count of salt penny word

Working land to the knuckle knot

She: vision be of scarcity salvage seeing ration word frugal feeling

Spare salt of its water and of tears portion

She: words lye for the pickling to be mason’d come snow so what she said she really like “Baby, this family is hexed for eight generations. You, the seventh.”

Then, she died.

Once, when sun shiner, blue biggest, land longer, light vaster in a freer place to roam so I littler,

walking hand in hand with Fern down that dirt road where came the clearing in orange open, poppy full, and dandelion wide was a wooden stool and on the stool a man
denim downed to ankles thrusting

At thrusting’s tip, a cow. Round neck of the cow, a bell. End of the bell, a clanking
Fur muscles tightening and round the tightening
Silver echoes off greened ground and the blue above

“Don’t cry. Don’t look.” Place of cocklebur bite where I’m not to be
there I am
End of the knuckled hand, at crawl, under barb, past don’t, through weeded catch, in the cut
Where pattern rips at ow eyes open
At thistle At thorn
Me

Before Fern went, we cut her grapefruit like so, sprinkled sugar like so.
Like she liked it all with a frosted grapefruit spoon. Come death was bags of Texas Ruby Reds on a sunlit birch floor.

Once, over static, Fern said “you won’t get away from here.” She laughed Wildflowers through spore holes of the telephone. “What, Grandma?” I asked, hearing her. I didn’t know if here was home or family or the afflicted body or the memory or time and no one gets away.
THE PACKAGE


Instructions: Gather DNA. Simple and easy! it says. Do not eat, drink, smoke or chew gum for 30 minutes before giving your saliva sample. Fill the tube with saliva to the black wavy line. “Tell me about my Mother,” I spit.

January 6: My birthday.
Mother: “Have you taken the test yet?

January 6: Three hours later
Mother: “Did you do it?”

January 7: Mother says it’s important for me to know roots. She’s full Scot, descended directly from Braveheart, she says.

Back home for the holidays: Bed, the couch, bed, the couch, bed. Mother is lucky to make it to either. Life is simpler. Sole tangible deterrence to Mother’s
sole destinations: 5 stairs. I’ve never counted them before, the steps. Or thought of the crooked, geometric malice of the 90-degree angle. To say one was killed by a polyester, beige slope. That the tilt took her. Her body teeters. It’s haphazardly gathered itself whole for a miraculous second on a horizontal line toward the promise of vertical ascension. Like guacamole, it’s an anomalous victory. Once landing on a flat surface diameter, there’s another stair, or the potentially fatalistic intermission in which Mother either 1) rails on, heaves up (there is no railing here) or 2) spills in descendance. I am her daughter. Duty: to be the softest platform. What is my form?

This day: Mother crawls outside to the car. She doesn’t let me assist. Afterwards, breathless, Mother splays on Fern’s bed. Says cotton kills her, hurts her stomach. Another tumor begins growth here. Her stomach: Alligator Pear we name it. If we called things what they were, that’d be the death of us. We guess her tumor’s gender.

That day: I’m 34, cuddling next to my mother in bed under Great Grandma Fern’s quilts, reading a 2002 Volvo S60 owner’s manual aloud. It was the closest. “As long as I hear your voice,” Mother said, “and you’re next to me, it doesn’t matter what I hear.”
A nightmare: I open the Volvo’s door. Automatically, the front seat motorizes itself backwards while tilting up. The headrest swivels forward, manufacturing memory of my Mother’s body. Metal automatically slides to syncopate with her anatomy. In this sliding, the tilting, the slopes, her frame is traced. Red glow of a seat warmer clicks on. Tan leather waits. Nobody comes.
FACEBOOK MESSAGE

:: LOOK! It says quaint eco cabin on wheels. $79K. I could just pull you. By chains in your wheelchair while you sleep behind the RV. Take you with me wherever I am
:: funny
:: grandma [WILLA] hears roars in her head
drops spoons, leaves burners on
:: thump behind her ear they’ll cut out
:: blind soon but the worst is
:: she’s wearin’ wigs. embarrassing with yellow bows
today I ripped it right off her head cant be goin n2 hyvee with that thursdays is her card club & they all do it the wigs
:: them all sittin around a table, can’t see aces from queens w wigs on THE WIGLETS. THE WIGLET BRIDGE CLUB
:: u know life rly downhill when u start eating ambrosia salad
:: she has a tumor or maybe aneurysm too
:: you almost done writing that cookbook
:: know things is hard
time gets short when u lose yer legs, baby
:: CHIN UP
I KNOW

I know why hills and with head turns grass, dirt mounds move one place
to another cos Dead don’t die
Crawl, tectonically, in search of another
Dead don’t die
Crawl
Till find of other

Earth cracks up on backs
That’s why mountains why hills why grass
Daughters for Mothers
For Grandmothers
Have you seen her?
Searching
Everyone anyone all

Mt: Kilimanjaro: 19, 341 feet of
yearn 19,341 feet bodies tall
19,341 feet give up 19, 341 feet no
Stop. On. Go-
Screams crack rock in boulders fall Mother?
Father?
Scream stretches sand and ocean coasts are lip
lines dry choking water
for you Coast Atlantic,
Pacific, Indian for you
Crack white to salt for you
Rock to mineral to sand for
You

Picked up Falling
in grains through childhood’s
hand Yells up the toes For you
For whom are my goes I

Broken I

Infinite rock staccato I’
m sand sounds like
Seen him?
See her?
Everyone, anyone, all

Search of you higher, taller,
grows till I mountain
alone A body
search in tangle Bones twist wet marrow wrings
out like water The sadness of unborn water

Dreadlocks of dandelion
Teeth of thistle I come
Through dirt corpse can’t run

Memory
past
bone architecting the make of you Hollow
of the eyes more than the color

In every any all
meat empty holes of
you I nest Love past
fossilized you Crawl
for you
I do not rest